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*THE TASK OF THE SYSTEMATIC RELIGIOUS  
THINKER OF TODAY*

DANIEL EVANS

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Theology was once the great intellectual interest of thoughtful men. It explained their religious experience, justified their faith, and gave them intellectual satisfaction. It earned and deserved the title of "the queen of the sciences." It has now fallen upon evil days. It is depreciated and neglected. Its foes are many; and its friends, even in the Church, are not numerous. The explanation for this situation of theology may be found in the immediate practical interests of life, the new thought-world in which men now live, and also in the inadequacy of the theology once current to meet the intellectual and moral demands of modern men.

Explanation, however, is not justification. There is the same reason for theology today as yesterday. The facts of religious experience remain essentially the same, and they still demand interpretation. The faith of the soul must be maintained in a world which challenges its right to be, and against hostile systems of thought. The interpretation and vindication of religion are more needed today than ever before. The incompetence of old theologies is no reason for doing without theology. If we are true to the demands of religion, we shall be constrained to provide some theology. The new attempts at securing an adequate theology must, however, be thorough and courageous. The great need now is the discovery of some principle by which we can interpret the facts of religious experience and arrive at a reasoned insight into the meaning of man, the world, and God. It is the conviction of the writer that the religious thinker has given him in Christ this interpretative principle, and that his great tasks can be achieved by the use of this principle.

The question is seriously raised by some thinkers, when they

look upon the ruins of old theologies, whether a systematic theology is now possible. Is it not one of the ideals of the mind which must be abandoned? They ask, "Must we not be satisfied simply with the scientific presentation of the facts of religion, without the attempt at a philosophical appreciation of their ultimate significance? or, Is not the most we can do and also the best simply to show the values of religion?" Affirmative answers to these questions are accepted, strange to say, by many persons in the church.

It is of course necessary to discover the facts of religious experience and the reflection of men upon them in the past; but this scientific presentation is only preparatory to the deeper appreciation of their truth in the nature of things and, consequently, of their importance to men everywhere today. After science has done its work in any department, comes the greater work of philosophy; and after criticism and history have done their work in the sphere of religion, and on its products in the lives of men, in the institutions of society, and in its sacred literature, comes the greater task of theology in estimating these in the terms of their ultimate significance.

It is also a necessary and important task of the religious thinker to show the values of religion for modern men; but it is not his whole task. It is true that not all the facts of religion are equally significant, nor all past historic events necessarily of much value to men of today; and equally true that, since we live in a different thought-world from the men of the past, not all their explanations of religious experience are of equal validity for us. We need concern ourselves only with the moral and spiritual values of revelation which serve us in these later days.

We cannot however regard the task of the theologian as finished when he has given us his estimate of the values of religion. There are more needs of the mind than can be satisfied with values. There is the need to be assured of facts, and this need begets the spirit of investigation and gives rise to science and history. There is also the need for truth, and this gives rise to the scientific description of the fact and to the philosophic appreciation of it.

Religion too is profoundly concerned with facts. The events in the history of Israel and the facts of the life of Jesus are of the

first importance to the Christian religion. It has a fact basis in history, on which it builds its thought. It is also deeply interested in truth. It bears witness to the truth of its great facts and mighty principles. It endeavors to bring men into intimate relation with eternal realities. It grounds its values in the verities of a truthful universe. Values will not hold the mind of man long unless he is convinced of their ultimate validity. It is inevitable that religion should become theological, and that theology should become philosophical.

The religious thinker who sets about the construction of an adequate theology must find his starting-point in the religious experiences of men. The new theology must have this experiential basis. In this respect it will be as empirical as the other philosophical disciplines. However far-reaching its conclusions, its premise must be the fact of religious experience.

Religious experience takes its rise in the soul today just as spontaneously and inevitably as other kinds of experience. Man finds himself on this earth, with powers of mind which make it possible for him to be acted upon by the forces of the world, and in turn to react upon them. This action and reaction give him his experiences on the various levels of consciousness, from the lowest sensuous to the highest spiritual plane. The highest experience arises, like the lowest, from the sense of the action of forces upon him and his reaction upon them in feeling, thought, and conduct. He feels himself in relation with supersensible reality. There is another presence than the world and human beings which disturbs his soul with deep feeling, high thought, and great projects. He has the sense of dependence upon this great reality for his existence and for his larger and deeper life. He feels himself held in moral subjection to a higher authority than his own will or the wills of his fellow-beings. He is bound in obedience to a moral authority that searches his very soul, and has the august right to command him to live for the best. He realizes that he is not here for his own private interests, but in the interests of the Divine Being in whom he lives and before whom he stands. He must use his powers in furthering the interests of God. Again, and greatest of all, he finds that he may have fellowship with this divine presence; that there may be an interchange

of thought, and a communion in which he finds the joy of living and the inspiration for his high endeavor. These religious experiences take their rise here and now in the hearts of men. They are the profoundest experiences of the soul. They are the ultimate facts in our religious life.

But observe further that these religious experiences, taken in their general features, are not peculiar to one man, nor to a group of men, nor to one nation, nor one period in the history of the world. They are, on the contrary, human, universal, and persistent. The history of religions thus comes to the aid of the systematic religious thinker and helps him to make convincing the fact that religious experience is an essential characteristic of man. Religion is a constituent element in the life of the race. The human nature out of which it emerges is the same in all men, and the relation of men to the divine reality is essentially the same.

There are of course differences in religion. There are varieties of religious experiences, as there are of other experiences. The history of religion shows the same phenomena of development, arrest, and even retrogression, as other great human interests. All these facts, however, but serve to show how profoundly human a phenomenon religion is, how much involved it is with the career of the race, and how closely related it is with other aspects of the total experience of men. It is rooted in human nature. This racial aspect of religion deepens the foundation and broadens the base for the new structure which the systematic religious thinker must build.

The experience of the Christian man in this modern world has, however, a distinctive character. He is born and reborn in a Christian community. He enjoys a rich Christian heritage of thought and a great fund of religious feeling. The Christian consciousness is therefore the greatest fact in the religions of the world. It is the typical religious experience. In it religion reaches its highest meaning; it comes to its own; it is primarily moral and spiritual. This experience is deeper in its reach in the soul, greater in its power over man's life, richer in its cultivation of his nature, and clearer in its meaning for the interpretation of his life than any other.

The man with the distinctively Christian experience has a deeper sense of God, a truer understanding of his nature and character, and a stronger faith in his goodness. He has the sense that he is ever in the presence of the Father, and the conviction that love is at the heart of the universe, that righteousness rules in all things, and that the moral welfare of man is the supreme divine concern.

There is also a profound sense of moral unworthiness. The vision of the divine perfection reveals, by contrast, how great is man's imperfection. The vision of the divine holiness produces the consciousness of moral uncleanness. This sense of sin is not the primary fact in the Christian religion, but secondary; it is not original, but derivative. While it is one element in the Christian experience, and has a darker hue than is found in other religions, it is not the deepest element. For the very vision of God that produces in the Christian the sense of sin also produces the experience of redemptive grace. The Christian realizes that he is not left alone to work out his salvation. His redemption is the chief interest of God; and in this truth he finds his hope for the achievement of a noble character and his inspiration for high endeavor in bringing in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The deepest thing in Christian experience, in which it takes its rise and reaches its culmination, is the filial consciousness. The Christian soul cries in times of joy and sorrow, of success and failure, on earth, and forevermore in heaven, "Abba, Father!"

This Christian experience, which has produced the distinctive type of Christian consciousness, is due ultimately to Christ. It is true that these great truths are mediated through individual Christians, and the church, and other agencies which embody more or less the contents and the spirit of the Christian faith. There is a great Christian succession, which reaches back from Christian parents in the home to the apostles and martyrs of the New Testament; and all have had some part in the creation of this type of religious experience. But the primary source for this type of religious experience is found in the life and teaching of Christ. He is the author and finisher of our faith. It is his consciousness of the Father that creates our distinctive sense

of God. His conviction of the great spiritual realities creates our religious assurance. His moral earnestness makes us take a serious view of life. His hopefulness of man and the world awakens in us great expectations. When we are experiencing the deep and great realities of religion, we are reproducing his experiences. When we think of God as Father, interpret our relation to him as filial, and believe in the redemption of the world as at present in progress and in the future as realized, we are thinking in Christ's terms, and living in his spirit, and believing with him. When we are at our best, we are making his life our own. When we take the Christian attitude towards God and man and the world, we have the mind of Christ. Christ, therefore, is the creator of this Christian consciousness.

More than this, he is the norm for the determination of this consciousness. He is the type of the Christian experience which is to be reproduced in all souls. What is congruent with the type, or what can be assimilated to it, may have its place and part in the consciousness of other Christians. This is the principle which we must use in our estimation of the worth of experiences, ideas, and ideals in the modern world, and in the Scriptures as well. We must endeavor to enrich our experiences with the world-life; but we should be selective in our attitude towards this life and take only what can be transmuted into the Christian type of experience. There is no source of enrichment so great as the Scriptures; but even here we must be selective, and appraise everything by its Christian affinities.

The systematic thinker, in dealing with religion, is engaged not only with a genuine and profound aspect of human life but with the most significant experience of man. The mind functions at its best in religion. All its powers are in highest activity. The heart feels most deeply and intensely; the mind thinks most profoundly and comprehensively; the will goes forth in a mighty way to do the behests of God. There is nothing that makes such a strenuous demand upon the total nature of man as religion. The more soul, the more religion; the greater the activity, the deeper the experience. It is in religion that we have the transcendent activity of the mind. President Eliot has given noble expression to this thought in an address on the *Future of*

*the New England Churches.* "Does any one ask," he says, "why universities, which must inevitably be occupied chiefly with secular knowledge, should feel any great concern for the permanence of religious institutions? I answer, that universities exist to advance science, to keep alive philosophy and poetry, and to draw out and cultivate the highest powers of the human mind. Now science is always face to face with God, philosophy brings all its issues into the one word duty, poetry has its culmination in a hymn of praise, and prayer is the transcendent effort of intelligence." Religion is thus the greatest possible activity of the soul. It is man at his best. It is religion, as Hegel said, that constitutes the true dignity of man.

As man comes to his best in religion, so religion comes to its best in Christ. Religion may be regarded from a point of view which includes within it all religious phenomena. The general features of religion are the main interest. The effort is made to give an inclusive definition. Religion may also be regarded from another and higher point of view, which seeks for the typical features, and takes account only of the essential elements of the highest achievement of the religious consciousness. The religious thinker possesses in the Christian gospel the typical features of religion. It is not the general features of religions, but the typical features of the Christian religion, that reveal to him the true meaning of religion. For him religion culminates in Christ's religious experience. The prophetic hopes and longings of the hearts of men in all lands and in the long-past ages find their fulfilment in his life. His conception of God as the loving Father makes clear the object of their search. His fellowship with God on all the great concerns of the soul and of the world realizes their yearnings for full communion with the divine. His thought of all men as the children of God, his interpretation of human life as a moral relation, and his ideal of the brotherhood of man as the social end of every man's endeavor, satisfy the moral seriousness of all the great souls whose passion has been to make religion a thing, not of ritual nor of dogma, but of life. Jesus is himself the greatest thing in the Christian religion. In him we see what religious experience is in all its depth and breadth and height. He is the glorious illustration of the relig-

ious life. Religion realizes its great possibilities in his personality. He is the greatest soul at its best in the highest sphere of human life.

It is an essential and distinguishing feature of the religious experience, at its lowest racial level and at its highest Christian summit, that it has an objective reference. While it is a profoundly emotional experience, it is not wholly so, nor does its emotion terminate in the self. The religious feelings are outgoing feelings. They imply an objective reality from whose stimulus they take their rise and to which they go out in search as their proper object. While religion is the profoundest subjective experience possible to man, it is also the most objective. If it were not due to a direct relation with a divine reality, it could not hold or win the attention of serious men. When we are profoundly religious, we are compelled to become philosophical and theological. We must seek to know the objective reality with which our religion links us. There is the same reason for believing in the divine reality into relation with which we are brought by our religious experience as there is for belief in any other objective reality which comes into our experience. The venture of faith here is the same the soul makes in practical conduct, science, and philosophy. The soul is not great enough for itself, and it is too great for ultimate scepticism at this point. It seeks to know the eternal reality.

The great problem, however, has been to find some principle by which the nature and meaning of the eternal reality might be known. As long as men had recourse to something less significant than themselves, there could be no true interpretation of God or the world. It was only when they took the best in their own lives as the principle of interpretation that they began to read aright the meaning of the life of God.

Now the systematic religious thinker takes the best soul in the history of the race as the key to the meaning of God and all things. He finds in Christ the man who is the measure of all things. While he is indebted primarily to Greek philosophy for the humanistic principle, he is indebted to the Christian religion for the person who is great enough to serve as the principle. Protagoras was the first to assert the principle that "man

is the measure of all things." He evidently intended it to be a sceptical principle. He meant by it that in our interpretation of life we cannot get beyond the human point of view, and, indeed, each man is shut up to his own point of view. It is impossible to get an objective criterion. There is therefore no use in wasting time and strength in this futile endeavor.

The first attempt at a deeper reading of life through a constructive use of this humanistic principle was made by Socrates. Renouncing the attempt to interpret the natural world, he gave himself the more strenuously to the interpretation of the inner nature of man. He held that there is a real science of human nature. If man is the measure of all things, then the measure is at least a being with moral ends which can be brought into the light of consciousness by reflection and fashioned into beautiful ideals.

While Socrates did much in giving a nobler interpretation of the moral nature of the man who is the measure of all things, he did little or nothing in the larger interpretation of the world through man. He did his work so well, however, in making man fully intelligible, that his followers, from Plato to the modern idealists, have been free to make the larger use of the principle. They have all seen that "man's life furnishes us with a key which opens up to us the secrets of the universe more adequately than any other that can be used."<sup>1</sup>

This is the principle by which the theistic interpretations of the universe are made. There is no other way open to us to the heart of the universe except our own human personalities. If this way is blocked for us, then there is no other highway or path. The greatest minds have refused to believe that the way is blocked. They have made the great venture of interpreting the universe through the highest in their own lives. The systematic religious thinker finds himself here in the company of the great idealists of all lands and of many centuries.

While, however, these thinkers have used man in general as their principle of interpretation, the Christian thinker makes use of Christ as his final principle for the interpretation of reality. In the life of Christ there are certain elements which are of the

<sup>1</sup> Mackenzie's *Humanism*.

first importance for our interpretation of man, the world, and God. The first is his consciousness of God. This was vivid, intense, and continuous. It was the deepest experience of his life. He moved about in the world of the spirit in the fullest conscious realization of it. He had fellowship with God in a more real sense, and with greater satisfaction, and with a clearer understanding, than he had with men. This fellowship attained to a sense of oneness with God. There was harmony between his will and the will of God and correspondence between his mind and the mind of God. Thus the life of Christ became the perfect organ for the full expression of the life of God. The eternal thought in the divine mind came to and through his mind; the deepest love in the heart of God found expression in and through his heart; the purpose of God for the world was realized in his life. Jesus was thus the very incarnation of the life of God. His soul was grounded in the being of God, and God's life was embodied in his life.

This is the great truth which the Christian church has ever striven to express and to conserve in its doctrine of the divinity of Christ. It has felt assured of the nature, character, and purpose of God when it has seen him revealed and incarnated in Christ. The deepest longing of the soul to be certified as to the character of God and his purpose with reference to its life and the life of the world has been met by the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. The church has been sure of this one instance of incarnation. It has clung to this with great tenacity, and has served all after-ages by its fidelity. If the church had been robbed of this precious truth, humanity as well as the church would have been infinitely the poorer.

While the church was sure of this one incarnation, it had no such firm hold of the other great fundamental truth of the universal incarnation. The ideal incarnation is, however, but a special and perfect instance of the universal fact. It makes clear to us that the human as human is the medium of the divine. All lives are grounded in the being of God and partake of his nature, and in proportion to the development of their humanity they are capable of incarnating the life of God. The doctrine of the incarnation, when it is carried to its legitimate conclusion, makes

clear to us the twofold fact that all souls are grounded in God and that God is incarnated in all souls. This conserves for us in the very being of God all our great and precious values of personality and character.

The Christian thinker of today must make the largest use of the truth of the incarnation of God in Christ. He must be true to his principle and go all the way with it. He must not hesitate in applying it in interpreting God nor in interpreting man. He must read the character of God in the terms of the character of Christ. What men would not ascribe to the purpose or motive or conduct of Christ they must not ascribe to God. This will give us a new and the true reading of the life of God. The historic theology of the church has been morally defective since it has not used the total consciousness of Christ in its reading of the character of God.

In like manner the Christian thinker of today must apply the principle of the incarnation to the interpretation of the lives of all men. He will hold firmly to the ideal incarnation in Christ for its own sake, but also for the sake of the discovery and interpretation it enables him to make of the fact of the incarnation in all men. They stand in essentially the same fundamental relation to God as Christ, since they partake of his nature, and work out his purposes, and realize his ideals for them. They must be finally interpreted by the intention of God in their creation and by the possibilities of their nature.

Another fact in the life of Christ of fundamental significance in our interpretation of his life and, through his life, of God and man, is his great ethical principle. We may best express this by the term ethical personalism. The depth and breadth and height of the life that Christ lived gave him the profoundest possible personal experience and the clearest insight into the reality and worth of personality. The greatest fact in his inner world was his own soul. He had a deep sense of its moral dignity and a strong and great conviction of its infinite value. He discovered in other men the same moral personalities. If they did not realize their worth, it did not make their personalities of no worth. Even if they sinned against their souls, that did not rob them of all moral worth. It only made their sin the more deplorable.

Jesus realized the moral worth of men in spite of their sin, and consequently had a profound respect and love for them, and gave himself in service to make them achieve character and to bring them all into right personal relations with one another. The infinite worth of the personality of every man and the right personal relations of all men were his fundamental ethical principles. He dealt primarily with persons, not institutions; with men rather than movements. If men lived the life of the soul and were in right moral social relations, then the Kingdom would be established.

It is this recognition of ethical personalism that has made his ideal such a power in history and gives it such influence today. It is true that the forms of his thought are largely set aside, and that his precepts had special reference to local and contemporary conditions, and that many modern problems did not come within the field of his vision. Yet, after making all these deductions from his ethical teaching, the fact remains that he has given us the great ethical principles by which we interpret the moral worth of each man and the moral mission of all men. The fundamental ethical facts of life are the same yesterday, today, and forever. Each man has a moral personality of infinite worth; all men must come into the deepest and broadest possible social relations; the attitude of love upon the part of each and all, under all circumstances, and in all places, is their moral duty. We must still go to him for the ethical principle for the right interpretation of man's moral nature and his moral relations in the world. The more men do this, the deeper is their insight into their own souls, the higher their ideal, and the greater their devotion to the moral interests of man. The progress of the world is made by the realization of his principles. Christ's ethical ideal is the highway to the City of God.

Since Christ, then, is our key for the interpretation of God and man, and his moral experience and ethical ideal are thus summed up, we get a clearer insight into the purpose and the nature of God. We read the purposes of individual existence and of the moral movement of history as the realization of the moral personality of each and of all. The nature of each is interpreted by the realized personality of Jesus, as the oak inter-

prets the nature and the purpose of the acorn, and the relation in which Jesus stood to all the men and women and children with whom he came into contact gives us the moral goal of the ethical process through the centuries. What he was, each must strive to be; what his personal social relations were, we must work for in our day and generation.

These great ethical interests are true not only in the human sphere of the soul and of history but also in God's own life. They have their value for us, and they have their validity in God. They are real in God while only ideal in us; and their reality in him will secure their realization in us. We must therefore have a conception of God great enough for the eternal foundation of these moral interests. We must have a conception of God which will account for, and at the same time safeguard, all our moral values and social interests. He must include within his own life the outcome of all human life and love. Our idea of God must be adequate for our moral universe. Ethical personalism, here and now, must have its ground and richer counterpart in the being of God.

Self-sacrifice is another fact of fundamental significance in the life of Christ. As he stood at the centre of the moral and religious life and looked out upon the world with its multitudes of men, he realized that he could not do for them what he wanted to do without going to the uttermost limit of self-sacrificing love. The very greatness of his ideal for men and the vast possibilities of their nature would require the dedication of his whole soul in their service. The necessity for the sacrificial life lies in the need of help for the realization of this great ideal and the unfolding of these vast possibilities. The necessity is not caused by the fact of sin, though sin increases the necessity and makes the task infinitely more difficult. The law of sacrifice is the law of the universe prior to the sin of man, and will be its law after his sin is but the pale memory of his earthly career. Yet the fact of sin makes the sacrificial life a greater necessity, and fills it with poignant experiences. Jesus realized as no one else that the sin of man was the great hindrance to the realization of his ideal purpose for them. Their sin made them blind to what they were; it sunk them into the depths of animalism; it set

them in moral isolation from one another or in antagonism to one another; it made impossible the coming of the Kingdom in which all would be brothers; it kept them apart from their heavenly Father.

When he thought of what men were by nature and what they could be in character, there came to him the sense of the tragedy of man's sinful life. The conviction was born in him that the thing that must be done, and the greatest thing he could do, was to save men from their sin that they might live the life for which they were created. It was this greatest and deepest of moral problems with which Christ grappled. He interpreted his mission in life in the terms of the salvation of men. He gave his great soul to this task. His soul felt the woe and misery of sin. He suffered the utmost moral cost of a sacrificial love. His soul travailed in pain for the salvation of men. It was through this travail of soul on behalf of men that he won them from their sin and bound them in love to God and one another. The process of atonement, or reconciliation, went on in the souls of men when they were in his presence; and the same process goes on, century after century the world over, when men come under the power of his life, as they reproduce his thought in their minds, his love in their hearts, and his purpose in their wills.

This great experience of Jesus is the key by which we open the door into the inner life of God. Jesus interpreted the life of God through the deep and holy love in his own heart. Before this love had its upwelling in his heart, it had its eternal fountain in the heart of God; before it called him to his high vocation, it had given God his eternal vocation; before it had involved so much moral suffering on his part, it had involved the same for the heavenly Father. The love which compelled him to live and die for men was the same kind of love which determined the attitude of God towards men. Christ's attitude towards men in time is the same as the eternal attitude of God towards all his children. The sacrificial love that had its highest expression in the life of Christ is the deepest thing in the life of God. It flowers in the world, and comes to fruitage in the life of Christ and all good souls, because it is rooted in the very being of God. The law of sacrifice through which men realize their moral ideals,

and spend themselves in the service of others, and establish the Kingdom on the earth, is grounded in the divine nature. This law of sacrifice thus yields us the deepest insight into the character of God. It is one of the most precious and potent truths of the Christian gospel; and the religious thinker must show that it has its reality in God, that it is the law of life, and that Christ was its truest exponent and best example.

Once more, there is the fact of Christ's certainty of the eternal preservation of his soul and of all souls by God. The faith of Christ in the loving care of God deepened with the years, and grew in power as the end of his life drew near. He based the immortality of the soul in the nature of God, and had the profound conviction, which amounted in his consciousness to a certainty, that death would not end his career nor defeat his cause in the world. He looked into the immediate future and saw the black clouds of men's hate and murderous designs; but he looked beyond this into the greater future, and contemplated himself as living with God and in the hearts of men. The last words on the cross show his absolute assurance of God's care and keeping of his life in the very moment of death itself—"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." There could be no greater conviction of the continuance of his life beyond this earthly scene. And there can be no more secure basis for that conviction than the moral character of God. Here is the fundamental ground of immortality. Here is our primary datum for thought on the eternal life. If God is not trustworthy, if his hands do not hold the soul, then there is no hope.

Whatever use we may make of Christ's resurrection, it can only be confirmatory of this fundamental thought of Christ. It is not an independent ground: it can only be at most a confirmation of his deeper thought. Scholarship may make it impossible for us to use the records of the resurrection as we once did; it may point out their discrepancies, indicate the legendary accretions, show the crass materialism of the later accounts, and even argue that resuscitation is not resurrection. We may be forced to admit all this. Yet the great fact of Christ's consciousness of the living God as the ground of our hope now and of our life hereafter remains untouched.

The great fact in Christ's experience, accessible to our thought and possible to our experience, is his faith in the character of God as conserving all souls in the eternal world. The resurrection faith is confirmatory of this. The conviction of the souls of men in the early Christian days and in our time that such a personality as Christ's is conserved in the universe forevermore is the thing that grips the heart. The annihilation of Jesus would be the destruction of the greatest personal value of the race. The moral character of God is at stake in the preservation of Jesus. The conservation of Jesus' life makes the universe a wholly different thing from what it would be if he no longer lived in God, and with him, and for him. The universe takes on a new moral character when the greatest personal value of humanity is forever conserved in it.

The same consciousness that yields us this insight and conviction tells us that his faith concerns not himself alone, but all souls as well. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto God. We too can commend and commit the souls of our dear ones and of ourselves, and indeed humanity also, into the hands of God, and be assured by Christ and by our hearts that they are safe in him. The conservation of the ideal human life realized is the pledge of the conservation of all human life for the realization of the ideal.

These four facts of Christ's consciousness constitute his right to be taken as the principle by which the systematic religious thinker interprets the being of God and the meaning of the world. The highest reality in human life is taken to assure the soul of its deepest convictions and to enlighten its thought of the eternal reality. The interpretation of the being of God in the terms of Christ's life and thought makes him supremely personal in nature, profoundly moral in character, and eternally altruistic in purpose. The meaning of the world is read in this thought of God; and the character and career of man, in time and eternity, are regarded as determined in ideal and purpose, and as fashioned and guided, by the loving Father.

The constructive religious thinker has the still further task of showing the relation of man's religious experience to his other experiences, and of vindicating its truth in relation to the other

realities of the world. It is required of him that he have a philosophy of religion. He must add to his faith knowledge. He must not follow the example of some who abandon this task.

The Ritschelian theology has served us well in fixing attention on the great ethical and religious value of the revelation of God in Christ. It has emphasized the central thing in the Christian religion and in Christian theology. It has freed theology from the charge of being a dry and devitalized interest. It has also liberated us from many things which men formerly thought more essential to the gospel. There is nothing but praise and gratitude for this high service. The whole Christian world is greatly indebted to this theological movement. It has, however, proved weak where a modern theology must be strong. It has divorced philosophy from religion. It has discarded metaphysic from theology. It has depreciated all theoretical interests in matters of religion. It has abandoned the attempt to add philosophical knowledge to religious faith. Practically the only place where God may be found is in Christ. All other ways to God are barred by the warning, "No thoroughfare, dangerous passing." It would save religion by isolating it from the serious philosophical pursuits of men. It would keep it in an inaccessible citadel; and has called in sceptical allies to aid in defending it. The worst enemy of this theology is its own fundamental scepticism. More than once in the history of religion men have tried this method of safeguarding its sacred interests, and always with disastrous results. There is no safeguard and defence for the sacred interests of religion like truth. This is the great ally of religion—"Thy truth is my shield and buckler." Whatever the truth, and wherever its source, it is the great safeguard of religion. The faith that has knowledge added to it will multiply its power.

We are forced to relate our religious experience to other experiences and our religious knowledge to other knowledge by two necessities. There is, first, the inner need for it. All the experiences of life have their rise and place in one and the same mind. It is the same mind that comes into contact with the world on the level of its material forces, and with men on the level of daily life, and with God on the heights in spiritual fellowship. The modern man has a variety of experiences and a multiplicity

of interests, and his first intellectual task is to bring order and coherence and unity into his own mind. He cannot allow disorder there. His mind must not be a junk-shop of various scraps of knowledge. Nor must it satisfy him to arrange his experiences and order his knowledge into separate compartments. This may serve very well as a convenience in the office or in the study, but it will not do for the mind itself. A man's experience and knowledge of various things must be an organic whole. They must have a vital connection. There must be dependence and interdependence of the parts and the whole. The mind's own life must be a living and systematic whole. A man must be religious with all his powers. He must love God with his whole soul. He must live his life in unity if he would have power and enjoy peace. The intellectual tragedy of divided interests we witness today in the lives of many men. Their religious experience and theological knowledge are at war with the new and rich knowledge of the modern world. There is no peace for the earnest and thorough-going mind except in the inner systematization of all its experience and knowledge.

There is also the objective necessity. The very fact that we live our lives in a universe is itself a demand upon us that we understand it. We must have knowledge of all our interests and experiences in their objective reality. Our various interests and the several branches of our knowledge have their place in the woven texture of things, which, like the robe of Jesus, is without seam. Every part of our knowledge and every one of our experiences have their threads inwoven in this seamless garment of truth. Or, to change the figure, everything we know or experience is in a context of meaning; it is never truly known apart from the context; and it can only be finally known when its whole context is read and understood.

We are impelled to try to secure a subjective and an objective systematization of the universe of truth accessible to us. We cannot, of course, secure this completely; our inner world is too incoherent, and the outer world is at once too complex and too fragmentary as it reports itself to us; but this is the sublime ideal which the great thinkers have ever cherished. It is a flying ideal they pursue, but the pursuit itself is inspiring.

We are thus at once compelled and encouraged to recognize the mutual relations and aids which our religious experience and our secular experience, our theology and the various sciences sustain and give to one another. Religion and theology may have the most to give, but the service is not altogether one-sided. It is like St. Paul's gracious conception of his relation to the Roman Christians when he wrote, "I long to see you, that I with you may be comforted in you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

The sciences throw much light upon the world in which we live and in the face of which we must maintain our faith. They reveal to us the sublimity of our world in its extent in space and its duration in time. They give us an infinite and an eternal world in which to live. They trace for us the protean manifestation of the one infinite and eternal energy that is the source of all things. They discover for us the marvellous laws which describe the career of the sun and also of the mote that floats in the sunbeam. They make clear to us the mighty movement of evolution from the star-mist to the coming of man, who stands "God-conquered with face to heaven upturned." They make us realize that however wonderful the mechanism of nature is, the teleological end reached in the ascent of man is still more wonderful. They enter into his soul, learn the secret processes of all his powers, and the intimate connection of the whole organism, and the significance of religion in his experience. They open to our gaze the long, difficult way the race has trodden to our days. They study our contemporary life with its vast complexity, tremendous powers, grave problems, and they prophesy greater things in store for our forward-moving humanity. They endeavor to give an interpretation of nature, man, and God in terms satisfactory to the reason.

The systematic religious thinker receives all this knowledge from the hands of these fellow-workers in the world of truth, and gives it a deeper meaning through the application of his great interpretative principle. For a philosophic appreciation of the deeper meaning of scientific facts and principles and their place in a universe of truth, it is absolutely necessary to have recourse to the humanistic principle of interpretation; and for

the systematic religious thinker, as we have seen, Christ is the highest principle of interpretation. The naturalistic interpretation of nature is made through the natural objects as they are presented to us, while the humanistic interpretation is made through the thinking subject. The fundamental fact, then, in our interpretation of nature, when we take into consideration its qualitative differences and teleological movement, is mind. Nature is the revelation of spirit. All its forces are the manifestation of will; all its laws reveal the methodical working of mind; all its advancing forms of life make evident the realization of purpose; the coming of man and the advent of Christ show us the kind of will and mind and purpose that lie behind and within nature. "We baptize," as Dr. Gordon says, "the creative Being behind nature and behind human history and life into the name of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

In like manner the systematic religious thinker gives a deeper interpretation of the life of man. He gladly takes from the hands of the scientist, psychologist, and historian all his facts concerning man's origin, his psychological functioning, and his career on the earth to this day; but he reads his life in the light of the incarnation. He therefore finds a deeper moral nature in him, a more sublime goal of all his endeavor, and an infinite significance in his character and career. The movement of history is towards an ever greater realization of the Kingdom of God. The whole process and the goal of civilization are read in terms of the Kingdom of God. In a word, the whole world of man's interests is the subject of redemption.

The theologian receives from the philosopher, his nearest fellow-worker—indeed, his colleague in the department of deepest truth—his significant principles and results. He finds himself nearer to the philosopher than to any other worker. They have much in common, and this common possession is becoming more every day. They are profoundly interested in ultimate realities; they are impelled to seek an interpretation of the meaning of the world, man, and God; they cannot rest until they find "the good of the intellect." The philosopher endeavors to find this good in moving from the world and man to God, and the theologian accompanies

<sup>1</sup> Gordon, *The Christ of Today*, p. 91.

him on his way. The philosopher is satisfied when he finds the ultimate reality; but the theologian desires a clearer understanding of this ultimate reality, and is profoundly concerned with its personal nature, high moral character, and everlasting interest in the lives of men. Theology seeks a clearer understanding of God for a deeper fellowship with him and a greater co-operation with his mighty purposes. With philosophy it would know all that can be known; but this knowledge is for life—"If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." The contrast between philosophy and theology may be illustrated by two scriptural texts. Philosophy loves the text, "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord": theology the text, "In thy light shall we see light."

Finally, the systematic religious thinker has the practical task of making his truth serve his day and generation. He owes a duty to his truth and to his age. He must endeavor to rescue theology from its threatened oblivion and recover it to the exalted place it once held. He must try to relate it to the throbbing life of the world, and guide the thought of his age on the deepest subjects of human thinking. This work must be done primarily in our schools of theology. It is of the utmost importance that these schools turn out men who have a profound interest in theology; who can think through the great theological truths, and have reasoned convictions on all the mighty themes of the Christian religion. The pulpits of the land will have more power when the preachers have a reasoned and vital theology.

The religious thinker owes a duty to the church also. He must strive to help it give more attention to the great contents of the Christian faith. The church sorely needs a better understanding of its faith and a deeper interest in it. Its attention is too largely taken up with secondary matters, and it lives too much for the immediate interests which serve to give it the semblance of power in the lives of men. The church needs to return to the central things of its faith, to the ruling conceptions of the consciousness of Christ and their mighty implications; and it is the duty of the religious thinker to help the church make this return. The more the great reasoned truths of religion take possession of the mind

of the church, the more will it be recalled to its primary tasks and fundamental interests.

Finally, there is the serious task of ministering to the men who are no longer in intellectual sympathy with the church nor with the Christian religion. This is one of the ominous facts of our day. It is a grave question whether the church has not lost its intellectual leadership. There is no doubt of this as respects the Catholic Church, for it is dead set against the whole modern movement of thought. Unless the religious thinkers in the Protestant churches win the place of leadership, grave consequences will be inevitable. We can still count upon the moral sentiment of the community, which is largely Christian, and still more upon the Christian ethical ideal. But both the sentiment and the ideal are due to the fundamental truths of the Christian religion. We cannot expect that men will long feel the power of the moral sentiment and hold to the Christian ethical ideal when they are perplexed, or in grave doubt, about the fundamental truths of the gospel. Our only hope of keeping the sentiment of the age Christian and of maintaining the Christian ideal in its rightful place lies in making these fundamental truths the dominant ideas in the minds of men. This is the urgent duty of the systematic religious thinker.